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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT Monday, June 1, 1936

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "CARE OF FOOD TO PREVENT FOOD POISONING." Information from the Food and Drug Administration, United States Department of Agriculture.

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Friends, I hereby nominate, as Public Enemy Number One in the private or public kitchen -- I hereby nominate Carelessness. I make this nomination after reading today's report from our correspondent with the Food and Drug Administration.

Quoting directly: "Carelessness, pure and simple, is almost always the cause of food poisoning; carelessness in handling food after it reaches the kitchen. . . . Practically all the outbreaks investigated by Food and Drug officials during the past ten years have been the result of carelessness on the part of those who prepared the food in the home -- or in the public kitchen."

Continuing: "The Pure Food Law forbids traffic in any food that is adulterated because of added dangerous ingredients, or because it is filthy, putrid, or decomposed. The law applies to foods shipped from one State to another, to foods manufactured, sold, or offered for sale in the District of Columbia or any of the territories, and to foods imported into, or exported from, the United States.

"Under the law, products capable of causing food poisoning may be grouped into three general classes. First, those that contain added poisonous substances, like arsenic or lead; second, those that harbor disease germs, such as oysters or milk containing the bacteria of typhoid fever; third (those that cause the most trouble nowadays) foods in which bacteria have developed, as in contaminated custard mixtures. Today, we shall deal with the third class.

"The bacteria that infect food are found everywhere. Give them a medium of growth to their liking, the necessary moisture, and a favorable temperature, and the bacteria multiply rapidly. They seem to be especially partial to meat, fish, and cream fillings for cakes and pies. Outbreaks of food poisoning at church suppers, picnics, and at fairs, especially in the rural districts, are almost always caused by insufficient refrigeration. On a nice warm day, when the temperature is ideal for the growth of harmful bacteria, stacks of sandwiches piled high to await the hour of the church supper or family picnic may become a distinct menace to health. Custard and cream fillings are also an excellent medium for the growth of bacteria, as shown by the outbreak of food poisoning a year ago in White Plains, New York, when 700 persons were made ill after eating pastries filled with custard or cream mixtures.

"Now food poisoning of the type caused by eating contaminated custard and cream fillings, although it happens only too frequently, is rarely fatal. Food poisoning of another and much more rare type, called botulism, is deadly. The botulinus bacteria are widely scattered throughout the soil, but fortunately, the botulism poison produced by these bacteria can be destroyed by boiling for 20 to 30 minutes. During the past fiscal year, of the 73 alleged food-poisoning outbreaks investigated, only seven were diagnosed as botulism, and six of these outbreaks were caused by home-canned foods which had not been sufficiently processed.

"Of the remaining outbreaks investigated -- (those that eventually proved to be caused by food) -- the food was contaminated while in possession of those preparing it for the table, and not before or during interstate commerce. Also, among those outbreaks caused by contaminated food, authorities noted two prevalent types of poisoning; first, that caused by eating food that was not properly sterilized or refrigerated, and second, that caused by extreme carelessness in handling household insecticides in the kitchen and pantry."

And now, friends, we come to the part of this report entitled "Consumers' Responsibilities." Quoting directly: "Federal, State, and city food officials, so far as it is humanly possible to do so, see that all food and food ingredients sold in the United States are entirely fit to eat. But to stamp out food poisoning entirely, the ultimate consumer, particularly the person who prepares food in the kitchen, must take up the work where the Federal Government, the States, and the cities leave it. If each person preparing food for the table would follow the fundamental rules, and remember that sound food, freshly and thoroughly cooked, does not cause food poisoning, outbreaks of such illness should cease."

And here are the fundamental rules:

"First, keep foods free from dirt and from insects or other carriers of micro-organisms.

"Second, see that all food to be eaten raw is fresh, clean, and sound, free from stale odors, from slimy, rotting areas, and from mold. Fresh vegetables and fruits and other foods to be eaten raw should be carefully and thoroughly washed in pure water before they go onto the table.

"Third, serve cooked food as soon after it is prepared as possible.

"Fourth" -- (and this applies to the custard mixtures we've been discussing) -- "do not expose moist or soft cooked food to a temperature above 50 degrees Fahrenheit for more than a few hours. Keep it in the refrigerator. If no refrigerator is available, re-cook the food before serving it, even if it shows no signs of spoilage.

"Fifth, never take a chance on any food with an unusual smell or appearance. Be especially careful with custard mixtures. Prepare the custard only as needed, cook it sufficiently, and if you don't plan to serve it right away, keep it under refrigeration.

"The home canner will avoid all danger from botulism, the most serious form of food poisoning, by following the rules for processing recommended by the federal Bureau of Home Economics in Farmers' Bulletin 1471, 'Canning Fruits and Vegetables at Home.' This bulletin may be had for the asking."

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